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C O N F I D E N T I A L YEREVAN 000870

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/05/2017
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SUBJECT: RADIO LIBERTY REPRIEVE: PARLIAMENT VOTE FAILS FOR
LACK OF QUORUM

REF: A) YEREVAN 840 B) YEREVAN 829

Classified By: Steve Banks, pol/econ chief, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (SBU) Controversial draft amendments to the Radio and TV Law and State Duty Law (reftels), apparently aimed at RFE/RL, died in the National Assembly when the chamber failed to maintain a quorum. Sixty-six votes were necessary for the drafts to pass, the chamber was one voting-member shy, as a handful of deputies -- opposition and ruling coalition alike -- absented themselves in order to deny quorum. The parliament's extraordinary session closed today, which means that any pending bills introduced in this session are now void. The government will have to reintroduce the measure from scratch in a future session. No additional extraordinary sessions are expected this summer, so Radio Liberty is likely off the hook until at least the September regular session.

¶2. (C) COMMENT: We pushed the government hard on this, including with a tough letter sent to parliament speaker Tigran Torossian, who fired back an angry rebuttal letter July 3. The July 3 statement by the Department Spokesman got broad play in the press here as well. The political opposition, civil society and relevant international organizations also came out full force, although GOAM leaders usually find them easy to ignore. We will happily accept the tactical win of the measure's failure today. We judge that key government figures got the message that the petty vendetta against RFE/RL was not worth it, deciding instead to let the measure fail.

GODFREY